JULY - SEPTEMBER 2017

FREE

TAGA SPORTS

just keep calm and do it

tough love | 8 effects of salt | gym-safe-smart | the gamble that paid off
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Tan Holdings

HEALTH IS WEALTH

Tan Siu Lin Foundation

2017 SPORTS CALENDAR

JULY

2017 SSC Summer Youth Futsal Tournament
Spend your school break at the futsal pitch of the TSL Sports Complex and join the competition for co-ed U12, boys U16, and girls U15 age group.

2017 SFA International Fishing Derby
Check the Smiling Cove Marina for the biggest and heaviest catch in the tournament. A whopping $10,000 is at stake for the boat that will break the record 942-lb marlin (single catch).

17th FINA World Championships
Victoria Chentsova, Christian Villacrusis, Lennosuke Suzuki, and Jinju Thompson will be representing the CNMI in this long-course meet that will be held in Budapest, Hungary.

AUGUST

2017 Pacific Oceania Junior Championships
Seventeen CNMI junior tennis players will suit up for the North Team to battle the East and West squads in the singles and doubles titles in Fiji.

Rites of Passage 22: Rampage
Trench Tech's second event of the season will feature action-packed MMA action and kickboxing matches.

SBL Masters League
The veterans of the diamond will take center stage as they compete in the Saipan Baseball League-organized contest at the Francisco "Tan Ko" Palacios Ballfield.

SEPTEMBER

2017 NMIFA Fall Youth League
The island's youth football players will return to the pitch to battle for the championships in their respective age groups.

2017-2018 Commonwealth Coalition of Private School Association Volleyball League
Private school students exchange serves and spikes as they fight for the middle school championship.

2017 NMIFA Dove Women's League
The Chacha Ocean View Middle School Field will host anew female football players entered in the competitive and masters divisions of the league.

This advertisement is sponsored by Tan Siu Lin Foundation

Love starts @ the Table

BIBA
Celebrate your health!

Share your colorful, healthy meals with fruits and vegetables on Facebook and Instagram with the hash tag

#loveonaplatecnmi

This message is supported by the Department of Family Medicine and Community Health at the University of Hawaii John A. Burns School of Medicine under the Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The contents of this message is from the CHCC-CNMI REACH and do not necessarily represent the official views of the CDC.

One of my favorites sources of ideas is TED, or TED Talks, a series of videos that go by the tagline "Ideas worth spreading." The one that features game designer Jane McGonigal, filmed in June 2012 in Edinburgh, Scotland, resonates. In it, she promises her listeners seven more minutes of life. She cites scientific literature, diverse studies, and research but what immediately grabs

her audience's attention was one study on hospice workers, about the Top 5 regrets of the dying:

1. "I wish I hadn't worked so hard."
2. "I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends.
3. "I wish I had let myself be happier."
4. "I wish I had the courage to express my true self."
5. "I wish I'd lived a life true to my dreams instead of what others expected of me."

Not to bring anyone down but McGonigal immediately segues to "post-traumatic growth"—"some people get stronger and happier after a traumatic event…a traumatic event doesn't doom us to suffer indefinitely."

The Top 5 things that people with post-traumatic growth say are:

1. "My priorities have changed. I'm not afraid to do what makes me happy."
2. "I feel close to my friends and family."
3. "I understand myself better. I know who I really am now."
4. "I have a new sense of meaning and purpose.
5. "I'm better able to focus on my dreams and goals."

How then do you skip past a traumatic event and go straight to reaping the benefits of post-traumatic growth? McGonigal cites four kinds of strengths necessary to achieve that: physical resilience, mental resilience, emotional resilience, and social resilience. What is noteworthy is that, as shown in the video, moving doesn't necessarily mean just lifting weights. It could be as simple as snapping your fingers.

What brought this to mind was what one of our writers, Dre Delos Santos, posted on his Facebook wall. He said the uncle of a client just had a stroke but is already on the mend. When asked how he did it, his response was: I work out. Dre said the severity of strokes will differ from person to person, as does the recovery. "But one thing is for certain—exercise does the body good."

That is certainly true. A fit body has a better response to traumatic events and can better withstand the vicissitudes and abuse that we usually heap on our bodies. This is where this edition of TAGA *Sports* comes in. This edition is chockful of information on what you can do on Saipan to get moving. Our newest staff writer, Bea O'Malley, has five suggestions on how to do it, while staff writer Roselyn Monroyo has a profile piece on one of the islands' leading personal trainers.

As always, we welcome suggestion, criticisms, letters, future story ideas, etc. (maybe not verbal abuse but if it's TAGA *Sports*-related, we may consider it). Just email them to editor@saipantribune.com.

Sinseramente,

JAYVEE VALLEJERA
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TAGA SPORTS
VOLUME 7 NO. 28
JULY - SEPTEMBER 2017

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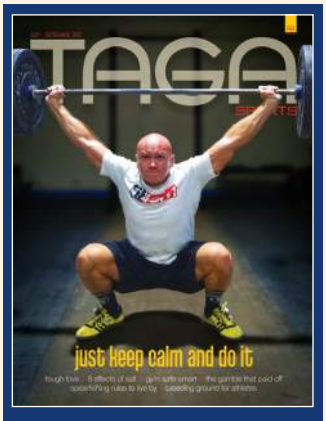

COVER ART
Cover photo shows Joe Quan of GetFit CNMI doing The Snatch at 145 lbs. The Snatch is a CrossFit movement that is considered the world's fastest lift. To be able to perform this movement with maximum weight on top is a show of strength and power.

Photo by Bea Cabrera-O'Malley

TAGA Sports is published quarterly by the Saipan Tribune Inc. with offices on the 2nd Floor, JP Center, Beach Road, Garapan, Saipan

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KAISA ANDERSON

Kaisa is a Registered Dietitian for the Public School System. Despite most of the students out of school, she remains busy preparing menus and nutrition education programs for the fall. She has renewed her passion with tennis after a couple months break, but has yet to perfect her serve. She is currently obsessed with the watermelon, avocados, and mangoes found in stores everywhere.

BEA CABRERA-O'MALLEY

Bea has played sports all her life and is currently into Crossfit. She was into running, volleyball, softball, basketball, and soccer while growing up. She competed in the AXN Amazing Race Challenge in 2006 and 2008 and was at the Crossfit Manila Throwdown in 2014 and 2015.

ROSELYN MONROYO

Roselyn had a one-on-one session with her subject for this issue, Jerry Diaz, bringing her back to her good old gym rat days 15 years ago when she used to just weigh 120-plus lbs.

DRE DELOS SANTOS

Dre was once an exceptional athlete in his heyday. Now he finds enjoyment in educating people on the importance of strength training. He earned his bachelor's degree in Kinesiology at the University of Hawaii and runs his own fitness business as a strength coach in Honolulu.

MARK RABAGO

Mark was really affected by the untimely passing of Andrew Kim as he is a classmate of Mark's eldest daughter. He also read the e-book Kim made for their 8th grade project and came away impressed by the young boy's passion for spearfishing.

Email letters to the editor to editor@saipantribune.com or mail to PMB 34, P.O. Box 10001, Saipan MP 96950. Submissions to TAGA Sports must include the writer's name, village address (no P.O. boxes), and daytime phone or mobile number. Letters may be edited for length and clarity and may be published or used in any medium. All submissions become the property of the publication and will not be returned.

8 powerful effects of salt

KAISAANDERSONRD
TAGA *Sports* Contributing Writer

There is much to say about salt. It inspired this article based on salt's best traits and, of course, the worst traits too. In my opinion, the power it has in the taste of food as well as in the body is better understood than any other seasoning or food tested. Salt's effects on the body and your heart health have been well documented, but what about sports nutrition? To be clear, this article illustrates the effect of salt in athletics for the physically fit and intense competitor. However, this article also covers the effects of salt on the average person and those with pre-existing medical conditions.

1 HELPS HYDRATION

The reason salt helps with our bodies having proper hydration is due to water's love for following salt wherever it goes when it is absorbed. Some endurance athletes will have heavy, salty sweat when exercising for long periods of time, causing the need to replenish fluids. On average, someone who has lots of salt in their sweat could sweat up to 500 mg of salt per hour, which equals one-fourth of a teaspoon. Very few athletes struggle to get their salt intake in by eating a regular diet, even if they sweat out a lot of salt, but good options would be deli meats, bread products, or canned soups.

2 REDUCE MUSCLE CRAMPING

The mechanism is unknown as to why a muscle cramps, but the accepted reasoning for the side effect is believed to be from dehydration. Many chemical processes happen in your muscles that require water and hydration to help facilitate. If water is lacking in these processes, muscle cramps could ensue. To ensure enough water consumption, the American College of Sports Medicine, in alliance with the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, suggests small amounts of salt intake during exercise to aid in proper hydration as salt only encourages you to drink water.

3 IMPROVES ENDURANCE

A study done by experts from a university in Spain tested two groups of athletes, giving one group with better race times a placebo, and another group of athletes with similar endurance capabilities but slower race times 12 salt tablets over three doses. The results showed that athletes given salt tablets completed 26 minutes faster than the placebo group. These results might suggest that because salt replenishes up to 71 percent of the fluid lost to sweating compared to drinking sports drinks with electrolytes at 21 percent, then maybe salt helps better hydration and performance. More clinical studies in better controlled environments would be necessary to encourage such high supplementation when the daily diet exceeds recommendations by 2000mg of salt or more.

4 SALT THERAPY FOR LUNGS

Salt therapy, also called halotherapy, has been in practice in Asian cultures for a long time. However, only recently have athletes started to participate in the practice of inhalation of salty air solutions in hopes to increase their lung function and breathing capacity. Now spas are opening up offering salt rooms for therapy, claiming benefits for asthma, sinus clearance, and reducing mucus in the lungs. Reliable studies have yet to be completed to test whether the inhalation positively affects athletic performance.

National Enforcement Mobilization Labor Day Weekend

August 16 - September 4, 2017

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5 RISK OF HIGH BLOOD

As mentioned earlier, water follows salt. This means, if you were to eat a salty soba soup for lunch, water will follow the salt anywhere the salt may be used in the body, which is everywhere. This causes your kidneys and heart to work harder. Think about what it feels like to run in knee high water at the beach—it is hard and requires more work. This is how your heart feels when salt causes extra water to surround it. This strain damages your hearts and eventually leads to fatal heart diseases.

6 OVERWORKED KIDNEYS

Your kidneys act as a filtration system, cleaning out extra amounts of some vitamins, tiny amounts of proteins, salt and fluids. When too much salt is eaten, the kidney' job is to find the balance and rid the body of the excess salt and fluid. Your kidneys work overtime to clean out the extra stuff it doesn't need. Over time this leads to kidney failure and damage, with serious health complications and diet restriction. Moral of the story? Don't eat soba every day.

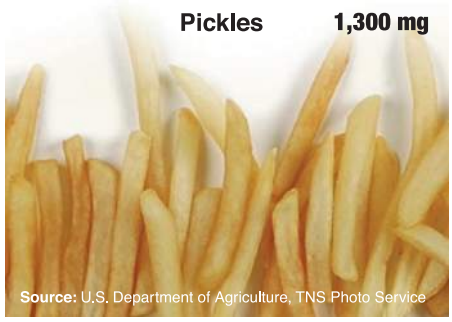
7 RISK FOR DIABETES

Studies have found that a high salt diet increases your risks of type II diabetes. Additionally, if you have already been diagnosed with diabetes, added problems can arise because of excess fluid and high blood pressure. Such problems include protein tearing through your kidneys, causing damage. Think of protein as a square peg trying to fit a circle—it won't fit, but with force, protein makes it happen while hurting your kidneys in the process.

Salt count

Adults should not eat more than 2,400 mg of salt a day. Approximate sodium content per 3.5 oz. (100 mg) serving of some high-salt foods:

Salted french fries	200-250 mg
Potato, tortilla chips	525-550 mg
Sauerkraut	660 mg
Pickled herring	920 mg
Pickles	1,300 mg

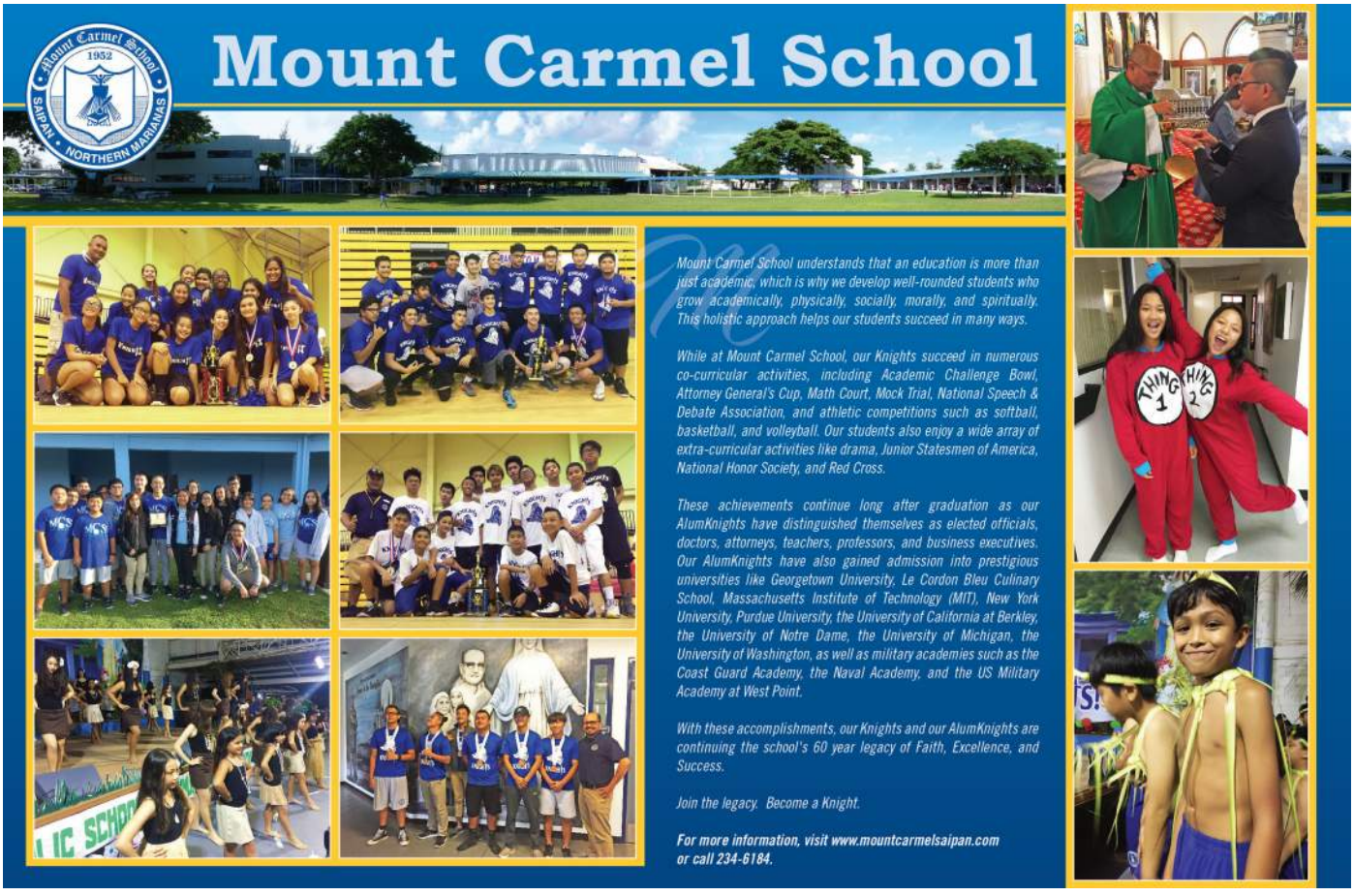


Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, TNS Photo Service

8 RISK FOR STROKE

It has already been mentioned how high blood pressure can be hurtful to your heart. This makes all the more sense for there being an increased risk of stroke. Because a high sodium diet increases your risk of poor heart health, you can imagine how high blood pressure and blood vessel blockages would put you at risk.

Most Americans eat up to 1 tablespoon of salt per day, which is three times the amount of salt recommended by the American Heart Association for each day (1 tsp or 2000 mg). To be perfectly clear, even if you are an extreme endurance athlete, meeting your recommended salt intake is the easiest goal you could set for yourself as you will likely exceed it. The benefits have not been strongly supported when it comes to salt supplementation when training, but if you are one of the limited few who could benefit, it's worth a try. Just remember, proper hydration is the goal, and coconut water, electrolyte sports drinks, and crisp refreshing water will get you there. Skip the salt shaker!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HERE'S TO TOUGH LOVE

DRE DELOS SANTOS
TAGA *Sports* Contributing Writer

In the day and age we live in, it's mind-boggling how many of us fail to take advantage of the available tools and resources we have at our disposal. Yet, funnily enough, we continue to weep and complain about how "hard" we have it.

For instance, you can hire a qualified trainer and have a pretty solid plan laid out *but* the ability to actually put in the work is nowhere to be found. Sorry, folks. You're not entitled to anything, and results aren't going to be handed to you on a silver platter.

Truth hurts.

1 EMBRACE THE SUCK FACTOR

It's quite humbling that more and more people are starting to know who I am and what I do. Having said that, whenever someone tells me the ol' *"I need to get in shape before I go to the gym"* excuse, I just shake my head. That's like waiting for the other three tires on your car to wear out before you take it in for repair; it makes no sense whatsoever.

Look, it's hard and we all have grueling schedules. Suck it up! And, guess what? We're always going to be put in less-than-ideal circumstances. In fact, something I've learned from working with my clients is that conditions are never going to be perfect (and are rarely in your favor). At some point you're going to run out of excuses, and realize that you can't get much done if you only work on the days you feel good.

Understand that taking care of your health, getting stronger, looking and feeling good, is a choice. It's your choice. Give an honest effort and work to make it happen.

2 ALTER YOUR ENVIRONMENT

When you're trying to get in better shape, it is, in fact, a daily struggle. At times it can get lonely, and it'll feel like you're walking on thin ice, which is why having a supportive environment is more favorable. It's surprising how a lot of people have next to no support. There's a ton of value in being around other people who want it as bad as you do, and you're cutting yourself short if you try to do it alone. When you surround yourself with like-minded folks, you automatically tend to do much better.

The best program in the world won't mean a thing if you can't execute it to a T. Having support from your family, friends, or even your co-workers goes a long way.

If you find yourself always hopping on and off the horse, it's time to establish an environment that's conducive to your goals.

3 CHANGE THE DIAL, DON'T STOP

For some, diet and exercise are synonymous with depression and unpleasantness. The thought of rolling out of bed to work out doesn't get them excited. For me and other fitness enthusiasts, it's a walk in the park.

An invaluable lesson I've learned from my years working at a commercial gym was that if you work easy, execution becomes hard. If you work hard, executing becomes easy. To give context, it's much the same with training. Initially, it will be hard, but once you get the ball rolling, it becomes less difficult. Working diligently improves the odds of success. It's all in a matter of staying consistent.

I'm all for taking breaks when needed, but it's another thing when you completely fall off the wagon, and unfortunately, that's what ends up happening. One week turns into a month, one month turns into six. It's virtually impossible to quantify the results when that becomes the recurring theme. The training never stops, folks. The dial just changes.

Message of Appreciation

Women's Health Month

Your health at every age.

Thank you, Si Yu'us Ma'ase, Ghilisow

The 3rd Annual CNMI **Women's Health Month** would not have been a huge success without the help and contributions of our generous sponsors, namely:

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Message of Appreciation

Women's Health Month

Your health at every age.

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The 3rd Annual CNMI **Women's Health Month** would not have been a huge success without the untiring dedication and hard work of the Organizing Committee members and Community Partners.

Thank you to all of you who have helped in making the activities and events during Women's Health Month joyous and successful.

We would especially like to thank:

Community Partners:

- Division of Public Health
- Maternal Child Health Bureau
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- Education Program
- Dept. of Fire & Emergency Medical Services
- Department of Community & Cultural Affairs

JUST KEEP CALM AND DO IT

BEACABRERA-O'MALLEY
TAGA *Sports* Contributing Writer

Young or old, there is a form of exercise available to anyone. One just has to look, explore, and see what fits you and your lifestyle.

"To enjoy the glow of good health, you must exercise."
— Gene Tunney

BEA CABRERA-O'MALLEY

CrossFitters perform the air squat stance. "The squat is a foundational movement in CrossFit. It improves athleticism and keeps hips strong and ready for other activities," said Jason Sablan, CrossFit coach at GetFit CNMI.

CROSSFIT

CrossFit is a high-intensity training and fitness program that incorporates several sports and exercise movements into the daily functional movements, according to Jason Sablan, a Level 1 coach at GetFit CNMI.

If you want to be physically active, his five tips are:

1 **Create intensity for the workout.** You want to give it a good effort, at least 90 to 100 percent, be it walking or running. Give it a good intensity-speed walk and quick jog. If you are not able to sustain high intensity, create an interval where you will walk, run, then walk and run that keeps the intensity up.

2 **Keep changing the workout.** Do not get stuck doing just one routine because your body will get used to it. Bodies need the challenge.

3 **Do functional type of movements like squats.** Squatting is a simple movement that works out more than one muscle group in the body.

4 **Do push-ups.** It makes the upper body, core, and pelvic area strong. If these areas are strong, picking up a pencil from the ground would be easy, climbing stairs would be a breeze, and carrying heavy load such as luggage can help you a lot, especially if you love to travel.

5 **Eat everything in moderation.** Eat more whole foods like chicken, fish, vegetables, and less processed food. Having a healthy body starts in the kitchen because of the food we eat. Good diet paired with exercise is the key.

Experience the benefits of CrossFit at GetFitCMNI in Gualo Rai. Go to getfitcnmi.com or call 989-4637 or 989-7899.

how do you sweat?

DEMALYN PAGARAO

DANA MANGLONA
Underwriter
Pacifica Insurance Underwriters Inc.

"I do aero kickboxing for my nightly exercise. I like how it feels like a full body workout. It barely feels like a workout, with all the music going on and all the moves we do. Almost as if we were dancing, and I love to dance."

ALEXIS HOFSCHNEIDER
Department Assistant
Tinian Mayor Office

"I injured my knees a few years back and swimming is the only activity I do that I feel does not strain my knees so much. It's fun and I don't know what better exercise to pick up on an island than swimming."

KEVIN RAZON
Choreographer
Saipan Music and Dance Studio

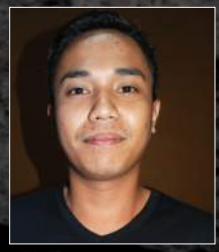
"I teach dancing. I sweat every day. Whether you're dancing to slow music or fast music, you're going to sweat."

MIKE TANGCOY
Tepanyaki Chef
Fiesta Resort & Spa Saipan

"I ride my bike from my house to Marpi, all over the island. It's a great cardio workout. It has definitely strengthened my legs, but I need to work on my stamina. I feel it is the best way to go sightseeing on island."

JENNALYD BABAUTA
Community Projects Assistant
Marianas Visitors Authority

"Jogging works up a sweat, but also gives me peace of mind. I throw on some music and just jog along the beach for the best scenery and lose myself while getting a great workout."



DOMINADOR CONCEPCION JR.
Bellboy
Kensington

"I work crazy hours so I rather work out at home than anywhere else. I feel comfortable and I can do it at any time of the day. I can keep at my own pace. I enjoy doing crunches and push ups the most, and I work my legs enough at work, being a bellboy."

BEA CABRERA-O'MALLEY

Arvin Mettao, personal trainer at Gold's Gym Saipan, performs a plank movement, "the basic movement to activate the core."

GYM TRAINING

Exercise is important because it gets people moving, especially for sedentary people. Getting active helps a person attain their full potential by moving, getting off of their desk, cellphone, and computer. Do productive things with you body and explore what your body is capable of, according to Arvin Mettao, a personal trainer at Gold's Gym Saipan.

You have to start from something. Whether a beginner or an athlete, these five exercises will be your guide to a healthy lifestyle:

1 **Do the plank.** One of the simplest and best exercises to trim your waistline and improve posture. Place forearms and feet on the ground, elbows straight and aligned below the shoulders.

2 **Glute Bridge.** The movement strengthens hip and leg muscles involved in running and jumping. The back must be flat on the floor and legs bent, with feet touching the floor. Slowly move the hips up and down, making sure you squeeze your glutes as you reach the top of the movement.

3 **Floor Cobra.** It is great for stretching and breathing. Lay on your front on the floor or mat and stretch out the legs backward and the arms next to the body.

4 **Body Weight Squats.** Helps improve leg muscles, affecting upper and lower body strength. Start with your hips back and not bending your knees. Keep your back straight, with your chest and shoulders up.

5 **Single Leg Touchdowns.** Increases one's hamstring strength. Stand on one leg and squat down by bending hip and knee.

Take personal training that involves aerobic and bodybuilding with weights at Gold's Gym Saipan, located beside the Sugar King Park. Call 23-4000 or go to www.goldsgymsaipan.blogspot.com.

Also, visit the Latte Built-Fitness & Nutrition 24-hour gym at the CDA Building on Beach Road, San Jose, or call 235-2265.

YOGA

Yoga is a way of life that incorporates movements, spiritually, breathing, relaxation and ultimately good health. Most people come to yoga for its physical benefits. "We try to create space in the body so other parts can work optimally," according to NJ Weldon, a certified yoga teacher. "Yoga is more than just poses. It heals the soul."

1 **Stand and sit up straight.** This lengthens the spine and helps with proper form and posture.

2 **Downward facing dog.** A really good thing to do if you don't have time for anything else. It builds strength while stretching the whole body. You're on the floor on your hands and knees. Fold knees below hips and your arms slightly forward of your shoulders. Spread palms and breathe in and out.

3 **Twisting.** You can do it while sitting in your office or while standing. Twist with length because you don't want to force your body with short bursts of twists that can cause injuries.

4 **Cat cow stretch.** Gives your spine a nice stretch and loosens the body to achieve relaxation. Go to the floor with knees bent, arms straight and touching the floor. Stretch looking upward then downwards, matching the movement to your own breath.

5 **Cobra pose.** This increases the flexibility of the spine, helps with people with respiratory problems and a good way to stretch the whole body.

Yoga classes are ongoing at Gold's Gym Saipan located beside the Sugar King Park on Middle Road. Call 233-4000 or go to www.goldsgymsaipan.blogspot.com.

Also, you can visit the fitness gym at the Hyatt Regency Saipan in Garapan. Call 234-1234 or go to saipan.regency.hyatt.com.

Yoga instructor N.J. Weldon, who is 73 years old, demonstrates a yoga stance. "Yoga does not require any person or whatever age to do it," she said.

BEA CABRERA-O'MALLEY

BEA CABRERA-O'MALLEY

Shalan Sarmiento, a Zumba fitness instructor at the Gold's Gym Saipan, leads a Zumba class at the gym. "Zumba is fitness dancing. Aside from the exercise, my students use it as a form of expression," she said.

ZUMBA

Zubma is a combination of dance and exercise. It helps with toning muscles and the body's core, decreases high blood pressure, and prevents diabetes. It is calorie and fat burning, according to Zumba instructor Shalan Sarmiento.

1 **Merengue is a Latin dance.** Since it has many movements, Zumba uses the merengue march in going forward and back, using small and big strides, with many repetitions.

2 **Salsa is another form of dance that emphasizes hips movement.** It is a great cardio that targets the legs and keeps knees strong.

3 **Cumbia is a slow dance.** From head to toe, the body moves gracefully like a wave, promising good stretch and relaxed movement of the arms.

4 **Reggaeton is reggae combined with hip-hop movement.** It is strong and high intensity. This is more of a cardio exercise that entails jumping and swaying.

5 **Chacha is great for seniors.** It is like walking with a style and the twists improve core strength.

Zumba classes are going on at Gold's Gym Saipan beside Sugar King Park on Middle Road. Call 233-4000 or go to www.goldsgym-saipan.blogspot.com.

There are also free weekly Zumba classes from 6:30pm to 7:30pm at the Garapan Central Park Roadhouse.

PILATES

BEA CABRERA-O'MALLEY

Pilates instructor Andrea Carr leads a Pilates reformer class at the Eucon Medical Health Services on Middle Road. "Pilates is a refreshing mind and body workout. It improves sports performance and prevents injuries," she said.

Pilates is an excellent exercise to work the whole body. The main focus is on the body's core. In Pilates, the core is called the powerhouse.

"When we talk about the core, people think about abdominal muscles right away but the core incorporates the abdominal muscles, pelvic, legs, thighs and glute muscles," said Andrea Carr, Pilates and yoga instructor. "From there, our body generates any movement that you want but that powerhouse needs to be strong, flexible, and needs to be connected to other parts of the body, especially the brain. We need that mind, body spirit connection in order to have a full workout."

1 **Cat Cow Pilates.** Kneel on all fours with the knees directly under the hips and the wrists under the shoulders. Inhale and lengthen the body from the top of the head to your tailbone, distributing the weight evenly on your hands and knees, with fingers spread wide and pressing down. This is good for spine stretching and an extension exercise. It is a gentle sequence of two poses and prepares the body for activity.

2 **Pilates Curl.** Lie face up with knees bent, feet flat on the floor and arms at the sides and roll slowly. You allow your core to define and manipulate those rolls. This is great for back muscles and it challenges your core muscles to work hard.

3 **Single Leg Circles.** Lie down on the mat, shoulders down. Extend the right leg straight up, with left leg bent. Then alternate. Start with small circles and go big when comfortable.

4 **Bridge.** Lie flat on your back, legs bent, and slowly push your hips up and down. It focuses on the articulation of the spine as well as getting into the glutes, hamstrings, and back body.

5 **Twisting or The Mermaid.** Use your waist to turn the body from left to right. The stretch gives attention to your sides. It helps relieve tension and lengthen the body.

Pilates classes are available at Eucon Medical Health Services on Middle Road. For more information, call 233-3647. TS

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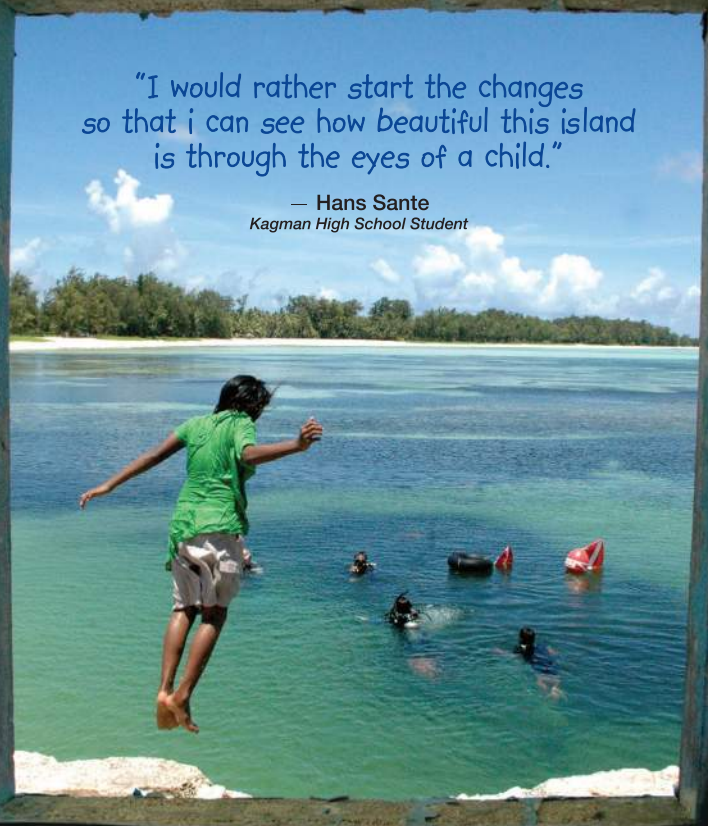
— Hans Sante
Kagman High School Student



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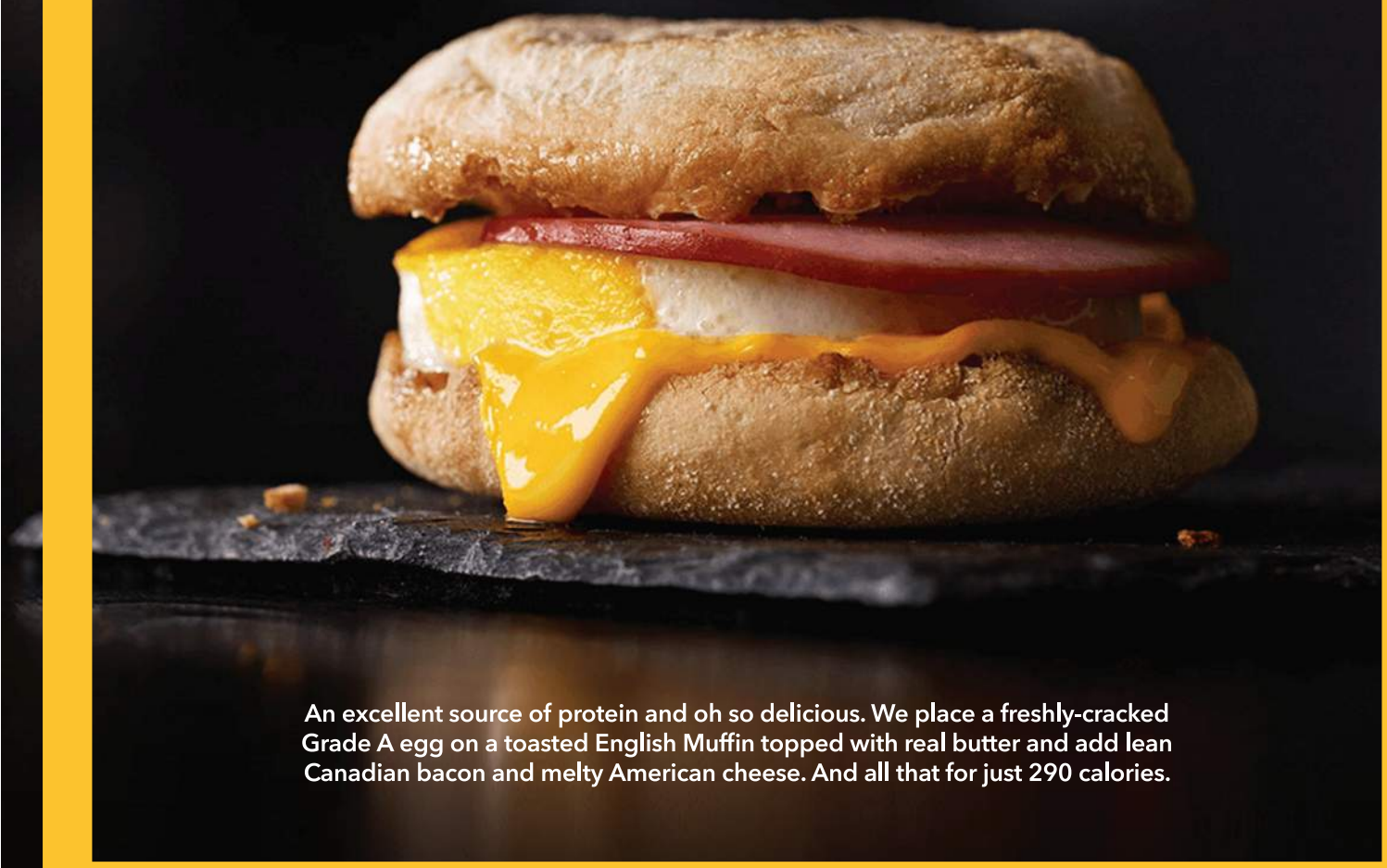

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Breeding ground for athletes

ROSELYN MONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

Next year, when the CNMI hosts the Micronesian Athletics Championships and competes in the Micronesian Games in Yap, watch out for the Commonwealth's new breed of athletes.

Through the years, the Northern Marianas Athletics has found a way to stock the CNMI's pool of athletes who represent the islands in regional and international tournaments, thanks to the McDonald's All Schools Track and Field Championships—the longest-running grassroots sports program on the island, tracing its beginnings to nearly half a century ago.

"The reason for our successes in the past… was the All Schools. We continue to discover athletes through this tournament and train them for high-level competitions. Every time we hold the All Schools, we get a glimpse of our future in athletics," NMA developmental coach Elias Rangamar said.

In last May's All Schools, Saipan Southern High School's Traven Quitugua, Marianas High School's Jamie Pangelinan, and Dandan Middle School's Leani Acosta stood out in their respective age group competitions, earning them spots in the CNMI National Team that participated in the 2017 Oceania Area Championships in Fiji in June. The three young guns are expected to don the Commonwealth's colors anew in next year's MAC and Micro Games and they hope to deliver the goods, just like the athletes that preceded them.

Proud products

CNMI Sports Hall of Famers Tony Rogolifoi, Tony Satur, Reno Celis, and Cecilia Lisua started their fabled playing years in All Schools, when it was still called the Junior Olympics.

"The first track meet ever held on Saipan was in 1968 and it was called the Junior Olympics. This meet was for all of the elementary schools on Saipan. These were San Antonio, Chalan Kanoa (now known as William S. Reyes), Oleai, Garapan, and San Roque (including Tanapag). Mt. Carmel School also took part.

"This meet was held in 1968 and 1969 at the CK Elementary School. A small 167-yard track was laid in the middle of the CKES playground. The events were 100m, 200m, 400m softball throw, high jump and long jump. Athletes came from the 4th through 6th grades," former NMA president Kurt Barnes said.

"They had nothing to compare the small track to, but they did well. These elementary athletes could whip around the curves full speed where adults would have to deal with centrifugal force and go flying off a curve in a tangent," Barnes said.

Satur and Celis competed for Mt. Carmel, Rogolifoi was with the Chalan Kanoa squad along with Diane Camacho, Rita Mettao, and Pedro "Bolis" Delos Reyes. San Antonio had Merced and Carmen Cepeda, while Benusto

Tagabuel, Manny Rabauliman, and Mae Quitano led Oleai. The then-Department of Education head Howard Kerstetter sponsored the meet, while David M. Sablan and Micrel Corp. provided equipment (stop watches and batons) for the competition.

According to Barnes, the meet was held after Super Typhoon Jean hit Saipan in 1968.

"The super typhoon destroyed about 75 percent of buildings on Saipan, including most elementary school facilities. The Junior Olympics were held to keep the students busy while the island was being put back together. It was so successful that it was held again in 1969, but with a coral track instead of the grass track," the CNMI Sports Hall of Famer said.

"It takes a load of people to pull off a track meet. Officials, coaches, athletes are all needed to host a successful track meet. The officials were indigenous teachers and many Peace Corps volunteers, many of whom were from the education department, but others were from the private sector as well. The competitiveness of all the athletes was admirable and they got along with rivals from other schools, which was not an easy concept back in the late '60s," Barnes added.

Today, athletes who used to compete against each other assist NMA in holding the All Schools and some even coach students.

"I am a bit emotional when I see that a certain athlete could no longer compete. However, when I see them at the track, training students or volunteering with us, it makes me feel happy, knowing they are helping us find new talents," said Rangamar, who often serves as tournament director of the All Schools meet.

McDonald's Sure is Good to Have Around

This slogan appeared in a McDonald's ad in 1974 and holds true to NMA, as the fast food company has been the corporate sponsor of All Schools for the last 14 years.

"I believe we started partnering with McDonald's since we had the new track back in 2004," Rangamar said.

"McDonald's involvement is very crucial to the All Schools program. It provides financial resources that we need every year to hold qualifiers and actual tournaments. Students and schools must be given incentives (medals and trophies) for their hard work at the end of the competition and McDonald's help us give these outstanding athletes what they deserve," NMA president Ramon Tebuteb said.

Unlike other competitions, NMA does not charge students or their schools entry/tournament fees for the All Schools meet. Medals for the Top 3 finishers in more than 10 events are awarded to students entered in the boys and girls U7, U9, U11, U13, U15, and U18 age groups, while top performers in each division are also recognized in a separate awards ceremony hosted by McDonald's. Schools also receive trophies, as the performance of all the students are considered in selecting the winning school.

At this year's awards ceremony for the All Schools, McDonald's Saipan general manager Joe Ayuyu Jr. vowed to continue the company's commitment to the grassroots program.

"We're happy to help our young athletes find a venue where they could excel, have fun, and stay active through this All Schools tournament. We're lovin' it—seeing them running as fast as they can with their teachers, parents, and classmates cheering them on," Ayuyu said.

"Besides the competition, we love to see the positive attitudes that these young athletes develop. There was this runner who stopped in the middle of the race just to help a fellow runner who went down, sportsmanship at its finest," he said.

work out safe and smart

ROSELYN MONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

A colleague once complained of a hand and wrist sprain after leaving the gym.

What happened?

She saw a co-worker using one of the equipment at the gym with ease and thought she could do that too. She did it—the wrong way—and ended up hurting her wrist.

That's a common mistake that people, particularly gym newbies, commit when they go to the gym—imitating what others are doing without the guidance and supervision of a personal trainer.

Sure, watching YouTube videos could be another option. However, nothing beats the benefits of having a trainer who creates an appropriate workout for you and teaches you how to do it properly to help you achieve your goals without injuring yourself.

Fortunately, Saipan has lots of gyms with in-house personal trainers. TAGA *Sports* sat down with one to tell us how to work out safe and smart.

THE PERSONAL TRAINER

"Body by Jerry," says one of the regulars at Gold's Gym Saipan.

He is talking about Jerry Diaz, a National Academy of Sports Medicine-certified personal trainer and nutrition specialist.

His works include Kelvin "The Big Hit" Fitial, a heavyweight mixed martial arts fighter who does not look and move like one, now that he has lost weight (40 lbs and counting), has replaced those bulges with muscles and abs, and has developed speed in both his hands and feet.

Diaz also spends time and shares his expertise with veteran athletes like Cuki Alvarez and Edsel Mendoza and even those not involved in sports who just want to remain fit, become stronger, and lose weight. He does one-one-one sessions with clients and also conducts them by groups. Diaz also holds a functional fitness class where 10 or more people (male and female) focus on movements and forms that we use in daily lives, like stepping sideways, stretching, to develop balance and stability, and work on your core.

His works with a client starts with a fitness assessment.

"We make body measurements to find out where the client is at," Diaz said. "After that, I ask the client where he/she wants us to go, her goals. Does he/she want to lose weight, bulk up, tone down, increase stamina and power?"

Once he has the information he needs, Diaz formulates a program that is tailored to the client's needs. The program changes, according to the client's progress, and does not involve workouts alone but includes nutrition, rest, and activities outside the gym.

"You spend only a couple of hours at the gym and majority of your time is outside, so it's very important for me to know what you are doing when you leave the gym," Diaz said.

THE CLIENT

Every client has specific needs. In the case of sexagenarian Rex Kosack, Diaz devises a program that promotes balance and coordination.

"I am 63 and turning 64 and people like me tend to lose coordination as we get older. While young people are looking at building strength, I am concerned with my posture, flexibility, aerobic, and of course, safety when working out, said Kosack.

Kosack has one-one-one session with Diaz just once a week (every Saturday), and is on his own every Tuesday and Thursday.

"Jerry will demonstrate a set of workouts for me and then I will follow them every Tuesday and Thursday and the set is usually done for two to three weeks. Oftentimes, he will take a video of me while doing the workout and point out if I am doing them properly or not and we will make the necessary correction right away. You won't waste time and energy and risk getting yourself injured if you do it the right way or someone is there to correct you," Kosack said.

"When we work together, I make sure he is capable of doing all the routines and he is healthy and safe," Diaz said.

As for his nutrition and rest, Kosack calls Diaz his "accountant."

"He asks what I ate—the portions. If I drink, how many glasses. How many hours I slept and did I bike or hike. This information is important because the next morning when I work out and Jerry observes, he would know if I am not being honest with my food intake or rest," Kosack said.

"I like him when he is being strict because it motivates me to perform better and be accountable of the things I do when I am not in the gym," he added.

Diaz explained that no matter how hard a client works out, if he does not do his part (nutrition and rest) when he is outside the gym, getting into a program would be pointless.

"Some people have this notion that if you work out for hours, when you get home you can cheat or reward

ROSELYN MONROYO

Jerry Diaz, a National Academy of Sports Medicine-certified trainer and nutrition specialist, is a personal trainer at Gold's Gym Saipan.

HOW THE PROS DO IT

FOAM ROLLING

This is a type of stretch either for warming up or cooling down. Its formal name is SMR or self- myofascial release. It helps to improve flexibility, function, performance, and reduce injuries. Client uses own body weight to roll on foam roll to massage soft tissue.

DYNAMIC STRETCHES

These are for warming up, to increase your body's temperature. They are more of movement stretching compared to static-hold stretching. They improve range of movement and assist with preparing mind and body for active movements or activities.

yourself by drinking several glasses of wine or eating two slices of cake. That's very wrong. Reward yourself by eating right—portion- and nutrition-wise.

THE WORKOUT

When you're at the gym and see people using the equipment, don't get excited and try one after another.

Talk to the gym staff if you don't have a personal trainer and ask for guidance. Remember, every client has specific needs, not everyone wants to be the Incredible Hulk. Warm up and do the basic first and increase your load/difficulty as you progress.

"If you're using the treadmill, start for 20 minutes with a minute or two to rest/cool down. Do that for several days or a week and then extend your minutes and adjust the level. You're body has to get use to the drill first and gradually pick up," Diaz said.

CABLE LIFT

It's a beginner to moderate core exercise. There are many variations, such as rotation and cable chop. This strengthens the core. Core in functional fitness is the main area that is being worked on. It also activates kinetic chain movement.

KETTLE BELL SWING

This is a very advanced power movement exercise. There are many techniques involved in this awesome movement. Professional athletes, trainers, and therapists use this movement for elite level training. There are many variations. This is a two-hand movement and the next step is a single hand. This activates the entire body to synchronize and kinetically align together. Legs, hips, lumbar, arms, back, and butt muscles are all activated in this movement.

SPEED LADDER DRILL

This is another advance training exercise. The drill works the kinetic chain (neck, shoulders, hips, knees, ankle) and total body muscles to synchronize and work together during movement. This is important for everyone, especially athletes who want to excel in any sport, as it activates and improves mind and body training that increases SAQ (speed, agility, quickness).

PLANK

Plank is a very popular core exercise and has similar results to cable rotations or other core workouts. Plank is also considered a therapy for lower back pain.

ADVANCED CORE WARMUP

This is an advance core warm activation exercise. It is single leg Romanian deadlift on a BOSU (both sides up), warming up both posterior chain and core. Core consisst of abdomen and back wrapped around the torso.

NO SHORTCUT

Goals, big or small, are not achieved overnight.

"You have to be committed and work hard for it," Diaz said.

The moment one signs up for a program, Diaz has to get his client's commitment to consistently come to the gym to do his routine or do other parts of the program at home.

"If you can't come to the gym or do your program, for example, when you're traveling, you can still do some things that will keep you moving, like hiking, stretching, brisk walking. The keys here are movement and continuity."

"Having consistency and continuity in the program, plus enough rest and proper nutrition, will help your body adjust/respond well to the demands of your workouts, thus chances of getting injured are lessened and desired results are gained." TS

SPEARFISHING DOS AND DON'TS

Saipan's spearfishing community mourned the death of Andrew Kim after the 14-year-old passed away while pursuing his passion in the waters off Sugar Dock last July 13.

Kim took up the sport at a very young age. Spearfishing was even the topic of his non-fiction e-book project in 8th grade. His classmates at Saipan Community School also reminisced how the young fisherman regaled them about his tales of catching fish underwater.

Morito Asai, general manager of spearfishing shop AQUASMITH, said the small but growing community of spearfishermen on the island should learn from the accident and adopt safety rules whenever they're in the water.

"No rules before but I created this 10 safety rules. This has been on our website…but in light of the accident, I just want to remind the public about these safety rules," he told TAGA *Sports*.

MARK RABAGO
TAGA *Sports* Associate Editor

Andrew Kim shows off one of his prize catches.

10 SPEARFISHING RULES TO LIVE BY

1 Do not dive without a buoy and a dive flag. Imagine if you are a boat captain and driving a boat at 20 mph (17 knots). All of a sudden a diver pops up in front of your way; there is not much you can do. This scenario is very dangerous and can lead to death. You can share the buoy with your buddy and stay close within 150 feet (50m) of the buoy. So if you forget your buoy and dive flag, don't dive.

2 Stay close to your buddy and always monitor each other. Most blackout cases happen after the diver has reached the surface. Make sure he's up and OK. "One up, one down" buddy system must be followed. Giving each other "OK" hand signals after each dive is highly recommended.

3 Weight yourself properly. You should be neutrally buoyant in the middle of your max depth. In other words, if your max depth is 60 feet, you should be able to float up without kicking at 30 feet or shallower. This makes it a little harder to go down at the start of your dive, but you want to put in the most effort at the beginning, not at the end when you try to ascend wearing more weights on your belt.

4 Do not hesitate to drop your weight belt if you are not 100 percent sure you'll get to the surface. There is nothing more important than your life, especially when you compare it to just a piece of metal. But you need some practice to do this because, in most cases, the belt gets stuck on your ankle and it makes it harder for you to go back up.

5 If you need to, drop your speargun, also for the same reason. The more you think, the more you eat up your oxygen—the brain eats oxygen way more than you can imagine. Don't think twice; just let it go. Remember, if you struggle, throw your speargun and just concentrate on getting to the surface. In most cases, you can pick up your speargun later.

6 Spit your snorkel out at the surface before you dive. If you black out underwater, your mouth will stay closed and keep water from flooding your lungs—as long as your snorkel isn't in your mouth.

MARK RABAGO

Morito Asai, general manager of spearfishing shop AQUASMITH, demonstrates at his shop how to administer cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

7 Know your limit and adjust your bottom time depending on your body or the sea condition. Reject the idea that you know your body and can instinctively stay within your limits. Some world-class spearfishermen have died from shallow water blackout. They knew their bodies a lot better than you do, and it wasn't good enough. Spend twice as long at the surface as your last dive to ensure enough time to recover. Using a free-diving watch, which indicates every second of your surface time, is highly recommended.

8 Stay properly hydrated. Your physiology is in a constant state of flux and this has a huge impact on your diving capabilities. The 2-minute, 60-foot dive that was a piece of cake for you in the morning could black you out in the afternoon. Always bring a bottle of water and drink it.

9 Always protect the airway. If your buddy is in trouble, you must bring him to the surface and keep his face above water. Remove his mask and remind him to breathe. Blowing across the eyes can also stimulate the inflation reflex. Perform CPR if necessary.

10 It is always a good idea to have a first aid kit on the boat/vehicle in case of emergencies. If bad things happen, or if you have any questions, you can call Morito Asai at 484-8888.

Most importantly, you can't remember all of this in one time so print this out or grab one at AQUASMITH and put it on your bathroom wall and read this every day! We believe that Andrew will be happy up there when all of you guys follow these tips and dive safe.

Since the CNMI captured gold at the 2006 Micronesian Games on Saipan, the sport of spearfishing has been seeing a gradual rise in practitioners.

"It's a growing sport, especially among the youth. There are more than 100 spearfishermen with about 20 in their teens, with the youngest around 13 to 14 years old. There are definitely a lot of Sunday fishermen here," he said.

Saipan's good water temperature and sea conditions, coupled with good visibility throughout the year, makes it very ideal for spearfishing.

For safety reasons, the best place to spearfish for novices is Laulau Beach, Asai said, because there's not much current and the area is easy to go in and out of.

"Other places like Sugar Dock, there's current. The [American Memorial Park has] a lot of boat traffic and it's only good for experienced fishermen. For beginners, I don't really recommend it."

The harder the spot to spearfish, the better it is for spearfishing, Asai said, adding that Banzai Cliff and Naftan Point are the island's prized spots for spearfishing. "These places are always rough so it's not really easy to fish."

An experienced diver can dive as deep as 100 feet and hold his or her breath up to four minutes. Newbies, on the other hand, can dive up to 40 feet and hold their breaths up to a minute-and-a-half.

There are really no formal classes for spearfishing and mentoring is only through family and friends. For basic equipment, expect to spend between $500 and $600 for a spear gun, body suit, and fins, Asai said.

What makes spearfishing thrilling, Asai said, is the idea of outwitting and catching the fish, as there are always easier ways to catch them.

"The challenge of catching a difficult fish makes it a fun sport. It's easier to catch fish in the evening because they're asleep, but we prefer catching them in the morning because it's more challenging," he said.

Asai said skipjack tuna, giant trevally (*mamulan*), and unicorn fish (*tataga*) are the types of fish they usually catch. He said the latter is very inquisitive; *tataga*s approach easily so they tend to be easier to catch.

His advice to up-and-coming spearfishermen: "Always keep the 10 safety rules and join our safety training twice a year. It consists of CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) and water training and search and rescue."

VACCINES SAVE LIVES & MONEY

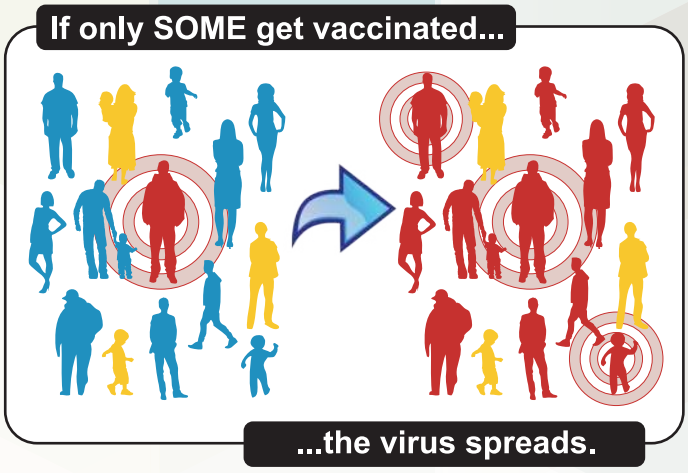
FEAR THE DISEASE NOT THE VACCINE:

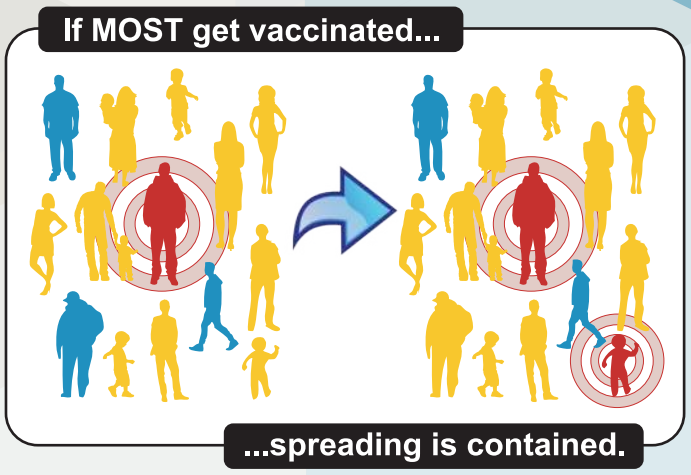
Recently there have been multiple outbreaks attributed to non-compliance and vaccine hesitancy, such as the Disneyland measles outbreak in California in 2015 that infected 121 people in 17 states. Diseases can attack us and our children anytime and anywhere in the world - even at Disneyland, the "happiest place on earth".

The World Health Organization (W.H.O.) estimates that 1.5 million children die each year from diseases that could have been prevented with vaccines. That's 1.5 million kids that can be saved with one little sting from a needle

VACCINES DON'T JUST PROTECT YOUR SELF:

Most vaccine-preventable diseases are spread from person to person. If one person in a community gets an infectious disease, he/she can spread it to others who are not immune. But a person who is immune to a disease because she has been vaccinated can't get that disease and can't spread it to others. The more people who are vaccinated, the fewer opportunities a disease has to spread.

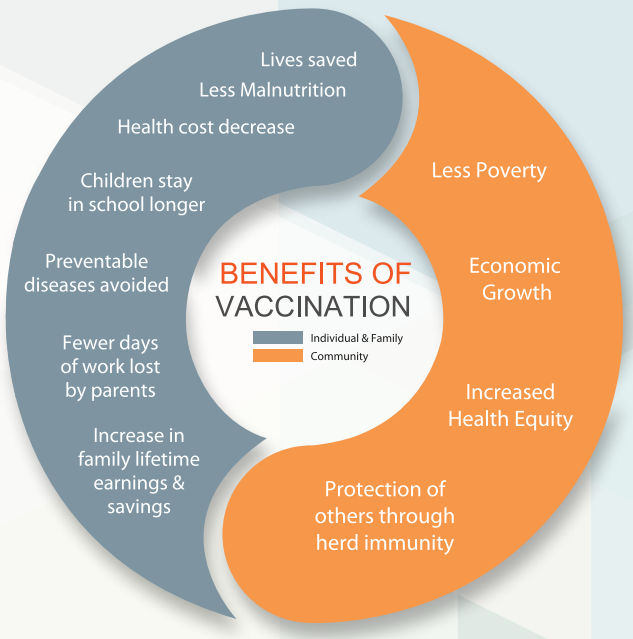




When children are not vaccinated, they are at increased risk and can acquire diseases from others in their schools or their community – including babies who are too young to be fully vaccinated and people with weakened immune systems due to cancer or other health conditions.

VACCINES NOT ONLY SAVE LIVES - THEY SAVE MONEY TOO!

A recent study by researchers at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health indicates that for every dollar invested in vaccines there is up to a $44 return on investment by eliminating treatment costs, loss of productivity at work, and reducing death and disability associated with vaccine preventable diseases



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For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/vaccines

FREDDIE PELISAMEN

MARK RABAGO
TAGA *Sports* Associate Editor

ROSELYN MONROYO

The late Rick Alegre used to call him unstoppable.

When he was just in fourth grade, Ed Diaz predicted he would be a future teammate and a fixture in the CNMI national team.

Dennis Camacho told his Guam teammates he's the CNMI player to watch at the 2006 Saipan Micronesian Games.

Freddie Pelisamen probably weighed no more than 180 lbs at his heaviest and a rangy 5'8" tall but everyone can attest that he's the most potent offensive player CNMI basketball has ever produced.

TAGA *Sports* caught up with the now 35-year-old cager to find out how he developed his arsenal of offensive moves.

Born on Saipan, Pelisamen said he moved to Anatahan in the Northern Islands in first grade because his family is from there, but soon relocated to his birth island. He's always been enamored with hoops from a young age.

"I first held a basketball when I was very young. We always played with a paint bucket that we fixed and a regular-sized basketball. That was when I was probably 6 or 7 years old. I played with my cousins. All of us are just athletic and we played all kinds of sports—baseball, basketball, and golf—because we live just next to the golf course here in Gualo Rai," said Pelisamen.

He went on to play for Oleai Elementary School and played in the varsity team with 6th graders when he was just in fourth grade. That's when he met many-time national player Ed Diaz.

"Ed was a referee in one of my elementary school games and he said, 'Man, maybe when you grow we would be teammates.' I was in sixth grade then and we were challenging William S. Reyes Elementary School in the finals."

"He told me, 'You're very good.' I think I averaged almost 30 points a game that time," added Pelisamen.

He was able to improve by leaps and bounds every year because he made it a point to play against older and better players.

"I grew up playing with the likes of Wayne Pua, Romeo Iginoef, Sid Tebuteb, Bert Laniyo, and the rest of the Ol'Aces boys. At Oleai, there were two basketball courts, one for big people and one for small people. The older players used to watch me. Every night we used to go out and play and sometimes we finish at 1am in the morning."

Eventually, Pelisamen would be invited to play with the big boys.

"One night I went down and the bigger players told me, 'Hey, come here and play with us.' So that's how I became a good player by playing with better players. Everyday I played and played until I reached a little bit of their level."

Pelisamen looked up to former *Saipan Tribune* reporter Shan Seman, who was a couple of years his senior.

"Me and Shan played together when we were teammates at Ol'Aces. He's a year older than me and I looked up to him, as he was very good in shooting, left and right. Our coach always taught us how to shoot with both our left and right hands. For the boys, shooting with the left hand was always a problem but Shan was very good at that."

His success in elementary school carried over to junior high where he suited up for Hopwood Junior High School.

"At Hopwood I was champion all four years and it continued when I studied at Marianas High School. I also played in the Micronesian Basketball Tournament and we won it all, even against Guam," said Pelisamen.

He also played in the 18-and-under Rotary Club of Saipan basketball league and won a bunch of championships there with Ol'Aces.

Later, he would play for Phenoms in the 21-and-under league. It's a team he considers the best he ever played with.

"Coach [Lawrence] Rosario just kept the boys together. It was like everyday we had fun. That was the best team. We won it all in 1998 and 1999."

Among the players Pelisamen suited up with in Phenoms were Ramsey and Randy Rosario, Frank Mizutani, Steve Santos, Roy Kaipat, and Jervy Babauta.

He also considers Fanihi a good team, but it failed to win the championship when Dennis Camacho fought with Kelvin Fitial and that caused them to not make it to the championship game.

Pelisamen said that Camacho, who also played with him in Brothers, was a very special teammate as the 6'1" center was Mr. Inside to his Mr. Outside and Mr. Fastbreak.

"[When we were] playing together, we were unstoppable," he reminisced.

Incidentally, Pelisamen narrowly missed playing against Camacho and Guam's national basketball team when the CNMI lost a close elimination round game against Kosrae in the Micro Games here on Saipan in 2006.

"I just missed playing against him in the Micro Games. He actually told his teammates that I'm the player to watch if they ever play the CNMI."

Like Camacho, Pelisamen also almost left for Guam to play for the University of Guam basketball team.

"When we played against Guam in the Marianas Basketball Tournament, their coach always told me to go Guam and play there and pursue my college degree there. That's how Dennis went to Guam. They always told me to go down there," he said.

Another teammate in the national team was Jericho Cruz, who now plays in Asia's first play-for-pay league, the Philippine Basketball Association.

"I always tell the boys to play against better players like what Jericho did. He was already good but got better playing against better players in the Philippines," said Pelisamen.

It was Alegre who always prodded Pelisamen to take his game to another level.

"I played with SIP [*Samahang Ilocano at Pangasinens*e] in the UFO [United Filipino Organizations] league. That's when I really improved because Rick pushed me to get better a lot. In championship games, he always told me 'you're better than everybody and nobody can stop you,'" he said.

Among his mentors, Pelisamen has high regard for former national coaches Rufino Aguon and Elias Rangamar.

What he remembers most about Aguon is how he conducted his training at the Northern Marianas College Gymnasium.

"When I first trained under him I was surprised he was having his players run 100 or so laps. Who does that? But I eventually did and it helped me a lot and got me into tremendous shape," he said.

The father of five now works at GIG Discotheque and the late hours means he can't join as many leagues as he used to. Still, Pelisamen admits that he can't really stay away from his favorite sport.

"I'm already feeling my knees from playing in outdoor courts. But I'm always ready to play when someone calls me. Basketball is part of my blood. I just love playing basketball."

Pelisamen is also glad that throughout his basketball odyssey, his father, John, and mother, Grace, have always been there to support him.

"My dad has always attended my games until now. Every time he hears I have a game, he goes. He's now 65 years old. He didn't play basketball, that's why he's surprised that all of us—my cousins and I—are very athletic and good at basketball," he said.

His advice to up-and-coming players is to just play and stay away from drugs.

"There are a lot of good players before that are doing drugs now. So my advice is to just keep playing basketball and please stay away from drugs."

Rollers coach Joe Diaz gestures to his players during a game at the Gillette Multipurpose Gymnasium.

ROSELYN MONROYO

The gamble that paid off handsomely

ROSELYNMONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

Nearly two decades ago, NMI Rollers head coach Joe Diaz decided to build a basketball team and take a chance on the islands' youth. That was a gamble that has produced lots of dividends.

"We started the team in 1999. That time, I first thought of naming the squad High 11 because Garapan was District 11 before. However, my wife (Verna) said the name does not sound good, so I thought of G-Rollers or Garapan Rollers. I chose Rollers because getting these young kids together, training them, and letting them play is like rolling a dice, gambling that you'll get favorable results. And for the last 18 years, we've been getting good results, be it at the on and off the court," Diaz said.

From G-Rollers, the group changed its name to Rollers Basketball Club, and now NMI Rollers Basketball Association. And from just one team (U14), NMI Rollers went on to have as much as six squads divided into different age groups, including a women's squad. In this year's Francisco M. Diaz Memorial Youth League, NMI Rollers fielded one U18 team and two U15 squads.

"Throughout the years, I would say we handled about 1,800 youth," Diaz added.

Birth pains

Like any new group, NMI Rollers had many challenges during its infancy in the late 1990s.

"I remember one time when we had a game at Koblerville, I had to fit in all 18 players in my old pickup truck. The police flagged us [but] the officers were very understanding and kind enough not to issue me a ticket. They even escorted us all the way to Koblerville to make sure that our boys will get there safely," the 39-year-old Diaz said.

Another was Diaz's lack of coaching experience.

"What I had that time was only my willingness to step in. The first team had a player and coach in Martin Teregeyo, but the following year he could not return, so someone had to take over. I volunteered. I played ball before, but playing and coaching are two different things," Diaz said.

"Thankfully, coach Elias [Rangamar] helped me out. I also picked up from the notes of coaches I observed and played against, that's why I call myself a 'trash coach.' The internet was also helpful as I spent nights studying defensive and offensive formations."

With a growing number of players and a developing coach, more challenges came, including finding uniforms, balls, and others needed for practice and games.

"The parents and our generous sponsors took care of those needs. They asked me what the club needed. A group of parents teamed up and sponsored uniforms for one team, while others did the same. Our government officials also helped out with monetary and in-kind contributions. That's how we survived. Up to this day, we are still here and one of the most active basketball groups in our island," Diaz said. "When it comes to coaches, older players become mentors to young ones."

Player's contract

No. They don't get paid to play, like the pros do once they sign a contract.

NMI Rollers' version of a player's contract is way different. Under the deal, players who wish to join the team and stay have to maintain good grades or face suspension.

"We help them get tutors so they could work on their grades. We collaborate with youth agencies like the [Division of Youth Services] to assist players who are struggling with their studies or having issues with their families," Diaz said.

The NMI Rollers sets standards in school performance because the group does not want to focus only on basketball.

"They also have to do well in school. If they continue to fail and could not finish even high school, their future would not be that good. Plus, if they keep their grades high and complete high school, there's a chance for them to get a college scholarship through basketball," Diaz said.

This year, two NMI Rollers players—Dalton Dancoe and Warren Ellama—will redshirt for community college teams in the U.S.

Come one, come all

When NMI Rollers first started getting players, they only accepted those residing in Garapan. Today, they welcome all.

"Players recruit their friends, brothers, sisters, cousins, classmates, and neighbors. We're open to everyone," Diaz said. "It does not matter if you have skills or not or with a disability."

The more number of players they could encourage to play ball, the more people they could get off the streets and away from bad influences.

"After classes or during summer, if you have activities for these youth, such as regular training sessions/practices, games, community outreach program, and cleanup drives, you help them spend their spare time wisely, instead of hanging out with bad company and doing vice," said Diaz, who conducts practices on Capital Hill every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday and at the Garapan basketball court every Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday.

"Sunday is my only [day] off and I go to church on that day, praying to guide our players to the right path and help us help them make good and productive members of the community," Diaz said.

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